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## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MESSIANIC IDEA.

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The development of the Messianic idea presupposes two sources, an objective divine revelation of the truth and a consequent psychological consciousness of the idea. These two things are coincident and closely connected, like two confluent streams, or rather like the rain from heaven which fills the wells; but they are not the same. The development of the idea of Christ or redemption from the natural moral consciousness or the primary conceptions of the human mind must therefore be as impossible as the development or the demonstration of the being of God from *a priori* principles of thought. It must be throughout, *ab imo ad summum*, a single and unique development from the facts of revelation, beyond which we cannot get or go. These necessary conditions of all true Messianic development and Messianic exegesis are admitted and urged by Riehm in his able work on Messianic Prophecy; though his conception of inspiration is inadequate and his weak concession that Christ and the writers of the New Testament in citing and applying the Old, sometimes present such individual and allegorical interpretation and arguments, the force and validity of which we cannot accept, is wholly groundless, p. 264. The consciousness of the idea of Christ having its root or origin in revelation, the Messianic idea in its full form will be found to consist of three correlative and concrete elements,—the covenant, the kingdom of God, and the theocracy. Keeping these ideas in view as they appear in the history of redemption, we now proceed to describe the origin of the idea of redemption and the principal stages of its growth. And in doing so we begin at the beginning with the first promise, which was the young world's hope, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel," Gen. 3:15.

1. This is the root idea, of which all others are but shoots and branches and fruit. We cannot fully describe the environment of this or of any other Messianic promise; but we will indicate and count the circular rings that mark the several periods of the growth of the beautiful tree which was planted in the paradise of God. And we will rather recount the facts of revelation on which the Messianic idea rests than attempt to gauge the exact measure of its knowledge or realization by believers. We have here, then, a vague and general announcement that the seed of the woman would ultimately bruise or mortally crush the head of the serpent. The woman's seed would be wounded merely in the extremities, the heel, one of the least vital parts; but the serpent would be mortally wounded in the head. The word "seed," indeed, has a personal as well as a general significance in the Old Testament in some instances, such as Seth, Samuel and Solomon, and is so interpreted in the light of the New Testament; but it does not follow that the believing fathers of the world would understand it in a personal or other than in a collective sense. The full flower of this budding promise

would not be seen till its full development in the Christ of the gospels. But one thing was clear and sure, that paradise lost would yet be paradise regained, and God in mercy somehow and sometime bring back his exiles.

2. Then, next, the Semitic division of mankind is declared to be the quarter in which the conquering seed of the woman was to be expected and found, Gen. 9:26,27. When the old unbelieving world was destroyed and believing Noah and his family, the seed of the godly sons of Seth, the sons of God, were saved, a fresh and advanced start was taken in the grand redemptive work. The seed of blessing to mankind was not to be found in the cursed line of wicked Canaan, or even in the prolific progeny of Japheth, but in the pious posterity of Shem. The grand and gracious idea of salvation to the race became restricted and particularized by being specially associated with the line of the Shemites. The first promise which sustained the drooping hearts of the sons of God, would thus be seen to be restricted to the specially blessed and victorious seed of Shem. This belief would gather strength, as a stream from the heights, in the minds of the faithful few among the faithless many during the long eclipse of faith and decline of spiritual life that followed till the calling and covenant of Abraham.

3. Then the promise grew clearer, defining the specific race and people whence the Deliverer would come, viz., the seed of Abram, the Hebrews, "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." The victorious seed that would bruise the serpent's head, was to be of the seed of Abram both according to the flesh and to the Spirit. That seed was blessed and destined to bless all nations of the earth. Still this clear and consoling promise, read merely in the light of the past and present, and away from the light of its future fulfillment, speaks generally of the seed of Abram and not of any distinct person of his posterity. Yet it would enable believing Abram and all kindred believers to see through the vista of the ages a blessed day of redemption afar off, and to rejoice exceedingly. They would know that the God of grace had destined their race to be the special recipients of spiritual blessing and the special means and messengers of mercy to mankind. And this promise was soon developed into a formal covenant of grace, of which circumcision was the national seal, and Abraham for Abram the personal sign. The substance and the limitations, the tenor and the terms of this covenant, were marked and definite: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.... And God said, Sarah, thy wife, shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac....and as for Ishmael....behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly...but my covenant will I establish with Isaac," etc. It is quite clear that God had dealt with the human race by covenant from creation till now. We find the substance if not the form of a covenant in his primary dealings with the parents of mankind, two parties, God and man, terms of continued life and of certain and instant death, laid down by Him and understood and accepted by them, Gen. 3:1-3. This was no doubt a covenant of works and not of grace, of life on condition of continued obedience. But it was in itself a covenant of life and not of death. Obedience was the precept or prescription, life the promise, and death merely the penalty or result of disobedience. Then it is clear that, from the very day or date of the

subsequent promise of mercy through the woman's seed, the moral government of God was conducted on this principle throughout the antediluvian age, not only for the salvation of believers then, but for the fuller manifestation of his mercy as a covenant God, first to the patriarchs and then to Israel. This ground-thought runs like a stream, sometimes above and sometimes underground, throughout the whole history of the origin and growth of the human race, the long lives of the patriarchs, and the life of the chosen people.

Here then we have a formal covenant of grace with Abraham and his seed. It was essentially a revelation of the covenant of grace, made between God and his Son, made primarily with the Son as the second party and prospective Mediator, and merely secondarily made with Abraham. Not only the chosen seed of Abraham, but the chosen race of Adam, derived from the beginning their federal standing, character and destiny, from Christ as surety of the grace-covenant. The Abrahamic covenant had its root in a still higher form of covenant of the ages, which had two sides, a divine and a human, the halves of one whole, not then distinctly and fully seen. And yet we are assured that Abraham rejoiced to see the day of Christ. He would see the promised blessing of the coming Messianic age more clearly than the person of Messiah. And yet the apostolic exegesis of the promise implies that God not only designated, but also that Abraham discerned, a Messianic personage, by whom the elect seed would realize their destiny. Even the mystic term "seed" might mean a person as well as a race or people. And then, though it did not directly denote individuality in the context of the promise, it might yet connote or involve it in all the circumstances which embraced the whole chosen seed and Christ himself. And even the text itself in which the promise sits and in the light of which it must be read, expressly singles out and signalizes one individual, Isaac, one family and one class of character as destined to culminate in one grand person, the Mediator of blessing to mankind. And hence both kinds of unity, personal and federal, which involve one another, may be grammatically interpreted and summed up thus: "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." The text may thus be paraphrased: He speaks not of seeds as of several individuals, or of several sorts of seed, which he would have done if he had meant both Isaac and Ishmael and their families; but he speaks as of one, Isaac personally and his posterity, both genealogically and spiritually, which is Christ and the church, or the church in Christ. This view is confirmed by the hereditary knowledge and faith of the patriarchs, specially of Jacob, who invoked upon the heads of Joseph's sons the blessing of the Angel who had redeemed him from all temporal and spiritual evil by showing himself in vision at Bethel and elsewhere, and watching over him in his weary wanderings, and specially by a sight of his human face divine at Peniel, where he prayed and prevailed with God to get a greater blessing and a nobler name.

4. The next stage of this development is the particular tribe, the royal tribe of Judah, out of which the promised deliverer was to come. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; to Him shall the obedience of the peoples be," Gen. 49:10. This is no doubt a very difficult and debatable passage. The term "Shiloh" has been the cross of interpreters in all ages. The ancient versions take it to be a compound of *asher* and *loh*, meaning to *whom the sceptre shall be*. In the Vulgate the derivation of the word is peculiar and the interpretation is—*the Sent* or *Servant of God*.

Ancient and modern critics, who agree in regarding it as a simple and not a composite word, yet differ as to its significance. Some understand it abstractly; others, concretely; some, as a noun meaning rest; others, as the name of a place; the common view of rationalists, and others of high critical acumen, to be the name of a person, which appears to be its proper meaning. But the faith of the patriarch-prophet, the context of the passage and the subsequent facts of sacred history, forbid its being taken either as an abstract noun, the proper subject of the Hebrew text, or as a concrete proper name of a place. We consider Shiloh, as our version does, as well as most commentators, to be the name of a person, the proper subject of the verb, signifying not mere peace, but the *man of peace*, the pacificator or peace-bringer, and as corresponding to Prince of Peace, which forms the climax and the crown of Messiah's titles. In this view we have here not merely an indirect prophecy, involving the mystery of the Messiah and Messianic times, which most commentators, both Jewish and Christian, acknowledge, but a direct and designed prophecy by Jacob of Messiah as the coming seed of promise or the victorious Prince. Such as maintain that the patriarchs did not believe in a personal Redeemer may at least admit that such a belief was not only possible but highly probable in the case of Jacob under special inspiration on this occasion. The chosen seed had some evidence of the personality of the seed of promise, not only before the prophets, who declared the person and work of Christ, but before Moses, who foretold a prophet like himself but greater, whom the people would hear as Mediator between God and them.

5. We have now come to the royal family of David as the next stage in the definition or development of the seed, 2 Sam. 7:17; Ps. 89:19, etc. The substance of this prophecy lies in these words, "I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him.... His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me." Luke 1:33. This is not a direct Messianic prophecy, in which the prophet speaks of Christ and none else, but an indirect one, in which he is a type of the Messiah. It declares both the personality and the sovereignty of the Seed of David, who is at once his Son and his Lord, Ps. 110:1. Not only the gradual development of Messiah's personality, but the experience of the people under the leadership of Moses and Joshua, the rule of the judges and the reign of the kings, combined to form a clearer and fuller Messianic consciousness. Henceforth the national expectation, or at least the hope of the spiritual Israel, of a personal Messiah, the Servant of the Lord, became clear, complete and continuous. They expected the Messiah to spring not only from the royal tribe of Judah but from the royal family of David, and had a clearer consciousness of his personality than of his divinity and work. Instead of looking for a spiritual Saviour from sin and sorrow, carnal Israel merely expected a conquering king, who would deliver them from the hand of their enemies and reign over them in righteousness and peace. This minor hope they never lost in the days of their greatest darkness, degradation and despondency. Messiah in his person and work was the desire in some form of all Israel, and through her, less or more, of all nations which knew her history and hopes. He was expected by the Jews under such names or designations as Messiah, the Branch, Immanuel, the Prince of Peace, the Son of God, the Angel of the Covenant, and the Servant of Jehovah, and by the nations of the East as the Prince who would arise and obtain the empire of the world.

6. As the day of Christ approached, prophecy became more special, and his birthplace is defined. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth that is to be ruler in Israel," Mic. 5:2. The diversity between the Hebrew and New Testament Greek does not affect the sense of the text and the nativity at Bethlehem, numerically one of the smallest towns of Judah, yet destined thereby to become morally one of the greatest or most famous. This prophecy has become a historical fact, the result of a wondrous concurrence of providential events, and the wonder of the world. The announcement of the singular birth at Bethlehem-Judah was first made by a choir of angels to the shepherds, and next to the Magi of the East by a guiding star which led them to the place where the hope of Israel was born. To this spot of sacred ground the wondering ages of believing Christendom have been turned ever since. Bethlehem now vies with Jerusalem, and the memory of the birth in the stable with the ancient temple glory.

7. Finally, as the coming of Christ drew nigh, the angel of the Lord announced his parentage: "...Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived of her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus," Matt. 1:20-25; Luke 1:30,31. The Christ would be both God and man, Immanuel, not only the Son of Adam but the Son of God, at once David's Son and David's Lord, the Son of Mary and the Son of the Highest. Isaiah had prepared the faithful for this mysterious parentage by his grand prophecy of the birth of the virgin's son, Immanuel. The Messiah would not abhor the virgin's womb, that he might become "God with us." This was done when Messiah was born of Mary, and the Son of God became Jesus, the Son of man. Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22,23. The Christ was then divulged, and the Messianic idea fully developed. All the scattered rays of prophecy were concentrated in Jesus as their focus. All the confluent streams of grace and truth had met and merged in him, the end of the law, the goal of the grand march of Messianic prophecy, the revelation of the mystery of the ages, the denouement of the divine redemptive plan, "the brightness of God's glory and the express impress of His substance." Heb. 1:1-3.

We find, therefore, not only a gradual objective Messianic revelation, but a corresponding subjective Messianic consciousness, which grew like the rising sun unto the perfect day, and as the mountain stream into the rolling river. At the commencement of this development the promised seed was general, comprehending Christ; then the special seed of Abraham as a unity, his one seed by Sarah and not by Hagar, and his one son Isaac, and afterwards the one royal tribe of Judah, the one family and one son of David, prefigured the coming Messianic personage. And now Christ, as the one grand seed of faithful Abraham, has become the typical head of the unity of all believers, the centre of the one collective seed, who are federally and morally all one in Him. Gal. 3:28. There was a progressive development from seed in general to a particular seed or people; next to a special seed or person; and thence to a living personage, who was to be prophet, priest and king of Israel and of God. The Messianic idea is thus realized in the threefold appellation, Jesus Christ the Lord; the first being his human name among men, the second his historical and official designation, and the last his personal divine title as Son of God, King of kings and King of Zion. Luke 2:11.